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Frank Reade, Jr., WITH HIS NEW STEAM HORSE
IN SEARCH OF AN ANCIENT MINE.

By "NONAME."



Mounted upon the ponies, Pomp and Barney started at once after the Steam Horse. Neither had yet abandoned hopes of getting possession of the Horse once more. But the Indians and the Steam Horse had got the start of them, and it did not seem possible to overtake them.

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Frank Reade, Jr., With His New Steam Horse IN SEARCH OF AN ANCIENT MINE.

By "NONAME"

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr., With His New Steam Horse and the Mystery of the Underground Ranch," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

A PHILANTHROPIC MISSION.

"HELLO, strangers!"

"Hello!"

"Who are ye, an' what in thunder kind of a rig do ye call that?"
The last speaker was a tall, powerful-framed man, who bestrode a fine specimen of the Mexican horse.

From the jangling spurs at his heels to the broad sombrero which shaded his swarthy face and fine, regular features, he was a genuine type of Westerner.

There was enough in his face to indicate refinement and gentle training.

But the wild gleam in his restless eyes and the hauteur of his face was evidence of his roving, adventurous nature.

He sat upon his horse like a statue, and both were, at the moment, upon the summit of a roll in the mighty western plain.

His gaze was fixed upon a strange-looking invention not fifty yards distant.

This was a Steam Horse, with every part made of plates of steel, and harnessed to a four-wheeled wagon.

Smoke was puffing from the animal's nostrils, steam from the whistle valve between its ears.

It was, in every part, a clever representation of a horse.

In the wagon were three persons.

One of them was a handsome, fine-appearing young man, known the world over as a famous inventor.

This Steam Horse was his latest and most wonderful invention, and he was proud of it, as he had a good right to be.

His two companions were a comical-looking Irishman and a genial darky, as black as the ace of spades.

The tall plainsman on the horse had met this strange equipage traveling across the plain, and naturally had hailed it with not a little of astonishment.

In answer to his hail the handsome youth in the wagon replied:

"I am Frank Reade, Jr., and this is my Steam Horse. I hail from Readestown, U. S. A."

"Steam Hoss!" exclaimed the plainsman, in amazement. "What sort of a rig is that? I've heard of a steam engine before now, and have ridden on steam cars, but never seen such a thing as a Steam Hoss before!"

"Well, you see one now!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., the world-famous inventor,

"I reckon I do."

"But who may I ask are you?"

The stranger doffed his sombrero.

"I ain't so well known a man as you are!" he cried. "But I am known over a good part of the kentry as Texas Jack!"

Frank Reade, Jr., gave a pleased cry.

"Why, I am glad to meet you, Texas Jack!" he declared. "I would like to shake hands with you!"

"All right, pard!"

Texas Jack, the famous scout, descended from his horse, and Frank Reade, Jr., alighted from the wagon.

The two travelers shook hands, and Texas Jack cried:

"I'm confounded glad ter meet yer, Mr. Reade. But if ther question ain't impertinent, what, may I ax, has brought ye out hyar?"

"I will tell you," replied Frank. "But first let me describe to you the working of my new Steam Horse."

"I reckon I'll be glad to hev ye do that," agreed Texas Jack.

So Frank proceeded to describe the mechanism of the wonderful Steam Horse to the plainsman.

"My first essay in this line of invention," said Frank, "was the Steam Man. Having been successful with the Man, I conceived the idea of the Steam Horse.

"It cost me no little work and study, I can assure you, to draw the plans."

"By thunder! I should have thought it would!"

"But I finally succeeded. The Horse, you see, is made upon the true model of the equine species, with good proportions.

"The body is made of plates of steel, cleverly welded and hinged in parts.

"In the body of the Horse is the steam boiler. In its chest is the furnace which can be kept closed tightly, the fuel being coal, which I have stored in the wagon, but I can burn any fuel.

"You will notice these armatures and the joints of the Horse's legs, and how nicely they work upon each other, and how they are all controlled by small driving rods.

"These are all controlled and propelled, both before and behind, by the main driving rod which enters the cylinder placed upon the wagon shaft.

"It required, as you can imagine, no little work to arrange the working of these joints so as to have them systematic, and to give them play and force.

"Upon the saddle you will see the indicator and steam register. Between the Horse's ears is the whistle. From the nostrils the smoke is driven out.

"So much for the mechanism of the Steam Horse. Now for the wagon.

"Notice the tires of the four wheels; they are grooved so they will not slip on a smooth surface. But observe particularly how I can make an open or closed vehicle of the wagon."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Texas Jack.

"You will see that here is a series of steel flexible curtains, arranged in lattice form, which can be raised or lowered as you choose.

"These are impervious to rifle balls. In the case of an attack by an enemy you are safe, for these curtains can be closed, and you have small loopholes to fire through."

"Ye could clean out the Injin tribes of the West with that rigging!"

"Yes, we can travel safely most anywhere. But observe the interior of the wagon. There are bunks for us to sleep on at night, a coal bunker and a locker for provisions, and another for ammunition.

"And these two companions of mine are Barney and Pomp, with whom I will make you acquainted."

"The top av the mornin' to yez, sor," cried Barney, with a grin upon his expansive mug.

"I wish you good-day, sah!" said Pomp, with a duck of his head.

"Wall, I'm glad ter meet all of ye!" cried Texas Jack, impulsively, "but how long have ye been out on the plains, Mister Reade?"

"About six weeks," replied Frank.

"Ah, have you seen any Injun signs?"

"We had a two days' running fight with Comanches. But we beat them off."

"Good fer you!"

"Now, Texas Jack!" said the young inventor, earnestly, "I am prepared to answer your question in regard to my mission out here in the wilds."

"Ah, yes."

"Well, I will explain, and after having done so, I want to ask your advice."

"Ye kin have it," replied the scout, warmly.

"There is in my town a poor widow with six small children dependent upon her," said Frank; "her name is Mary Barstow—"

"Mary Barstow!" exclaimed the scout with a start. "Not Bill Barstow's wife?"

"Yes."

"Bill Barstow of Big Divide?"

"The same!"

"An' he's dead then?"

"Yes."

The scout's voice was husky.

"Bill an' I were great friends," he said; "he was too big hearted. Left his woman poor, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well now, yer story."

"Mrs. Barstow has vainly endeavored to make the battle of life," continued Frank; "two months ago I chanced by her humble cottage and saw the landlord setting her things out of doors for failure to pay the rent."

"Ther mean coyote! An' yet I reckon he wanted his rent."

"Just so!"

"What did ye do?"

"I paid the rent and moved the furniture back in."

Texas Jack slapped Frank's shoulder.

"Ye're a man!" he cried, bluffly. "I like yer. Go ahead!"

"The poor woman was overjoyed. She thanked me with weeping eyes and begged me to listen to a strange story!"

Texas Jack was deeply interested.

"She produced this!" said Frank, displaying a yellow, time-worn document. "It is a curious plan of an ancient gold mine somewhere in the Los Pinos Mountains. It is said not to be difficult to find the mine, but impossible to work it on account of the murderous gangs of Apache Indians."

"That's correct!" cried Texas Jack; "they infest ther Los Pinos!"

"Well, the deed of this ancient mine belongs to Bill Barstow's widow. It was all he left her."

"All, and yet a mighty good deal," cried the scout, excitedly.

"Why, I know all about it. It's ther Mazetlan mine and it's a rich one, too."

"Is that the only hindrance in the way of working it?"

"What, ther Apaches?"

"Yes."

"Wall, they hev a white chief, a renegade, named Black Plume, or Jake Snyder in American. He's a bad one."

"Well," said Frank, resolutely, "that is what I'm out here for—to locate and open up the ancient mine. It is not for myself, but for Bill Barstow's widow."

Texas Jack's face quivered.

"My friend," he said, with some emotion, "ye're undertaking a task which belongs to me to do."

"Well, I have undertaken it," said Frank. "I mean to carry it through and give that poor woman her deserts."

"Will ye let me help ye?"

"Why, certainly."

"Then I'm with ye!" cried Texas Jack, eagerly. "I'll live and die by ye ter help Bill Barstow's dear ones."

He swung into the saddle and wiped moisture from his eyes with a sweep of his rough hand.

"Me an' Bill war close friends," he explained, "that's why I feel so bad. We scouted together a good deal."

"Then you know about where this Mazetlan mine is?" asked Frank.

"Yas."

"Well, we are lucky in having met. You can lead the way."

"I'd allus rather foller. Howsumever, if ye say so, I will."

"Well, I do."

"All right."

"Shall we go right along?"

"Yas."

The scout wheeled his horse, but reined him in quickly. He uttered a sharp cry and pointed to the horizon line.

"What is it?" asked Frank.

"It's Injuns!" replied the scout, with a warning accent. "An' as nigh as I kin see, they're Apaches too."

Frank Reade, Jr., was instantly excited. There was hot work ahead.

CHAPTER II.

A FIGHT WITH APACHES.

An announcement that a band of Apache Indians were bearing down upon one generally gives the average traveler a thrill of terror. In all the wild Southwest there is no foe to the white man so dreaded and so vengeful and merciless.

None knew this better than Frank Reade, Jr., the young inventor.

Therefore his face paled a trifle as he glanced to the horizon and saw that hideously painted and bedecked troop coming.

On they came at full gallop.

Their ponies were fleet of foot and well trained.

The savages had spotted the party of whites, and fancied it an excellent chance to add to their stock of scalps.

"Well!" exclaimed Frank, as he surveyed the approaching gang, "I cannot see that we can avoid them. They certainly mean business."

"Right you are, pard!" cried Texas Jack. "If yer afraid ter tackle 'em—"

"Not a bit of it," cried Frank; "let them come on."

"Begorra, it's a foine little reception we'll be after givin' the spal-peens av they want it!" cried Barney.

"Jes' yo' gib dis chile one good chaintce at dem rapscallions!" cried Pomp, rolling up his eyes. "I done fink dey don' know much 'bout de Steam Hoss an' we uns."

"I don't believe they do, Pomp!" laughed Frank, grimly.

Then he turned to the scout.

"I have a bit of advice to give you, Texas Jack," he said.

"Wall, I'm allus ready to accept," replied the celebrated plainsman. "What mought it be?"

"Turn your horse loose and come into the wagon with us!"

Texas Jack hesitated.

"Wall, I ain't afraid of none on 'em," he declared, "but p'raps I kin be of help to ye in thar?"

"Of course you can," replied Frank. "We want you!"

Texas Jack swung out of the saddle.

He threw the bridle across the pommel of the saddle and said:

"Now, Cyclone, git!"

The sagacious horse understood well what his master meant, and with a wild whinny galloped away.

"Golly! ain't yo' afraid dem Injuns will git yo' hoss?" asked Pomp.

"Not a bit of it," replied the scout with a laugh, "thar ain't a Pash Injun in ther West kin catch Cyclone. Yew bet she'll take care of herself."

Texas Jack sprang into the wagon.

The Apaches were now quite near and with yells and dismal cries circled about the Steam-Horse.

It was evident that they regarded the Steam Horse with surprise. But the Western savage has learned to regard the white man's inventions with less of awe since the advent of the locomotive to the plains.

Frank did not attempt to change the Horse's position.

But all four men with repeating rifles stationed themselves at the loopholes.

The Apaches drew nearer and nearer in the circle.

Some of them were armed with rifles and some with bows and arrows.

When within good easy range they opened fire upon the Steam Horse.

A shower of arrows and rifle balls came rattling against the steel sides of the wagon.

Of course no harm was done as the steel screen was impervious to bullets.

"Golly, Marse Frank," cried Pomp, "what yo' say 'bout giving dem rascals some cold lead?"

"Not quite yet, Pomp," replied Frank. "Wait until they are nearer."

"All right, sah."

All stood ready awaiting Frank's signal to fire.

The young inventor waited until the savages had become sufficiently emboldened as to approach within twenty-five yards of the Steam Horse.

Then he cried:

"Take good, fair aim and fire! Give it to them, all together!"

Barely had the words escaped his lips when the air was broken with the crash of firearms.

The aim in every case was sure, and four of the savages dropped with that volley.

Barney and Pomp managed to get in two more shots.

Then the savages with baffled yells beat a hasty retreat.

The American savage is never the one to face a foe in the open field.

Their style of warfare is and always was bush-fighting.

The loss of six of their number so suddenly wholly demoralized the band.

As their shots had not seemed to take effect, they could only conclude that the wonderful Steam Horse was "bad medicine" and ought not to be molested.

Accordingly, with yells of baffled rage, they abandoned the attack.

Away they galloped to the westward.

"Well, I swow!" commented Texas Jack, "that squall was soon over."

"They didn't want to fight after all," said Frank.

"I reckon they didn't."

Barney and Pomp were hilarious over the repulse of the Apaches. They were dancing a jig in the rear of the wagon, which Frank quickly put an end to by saying:

"Come, we have plenty of business to attend to now, boys. Barney, go to the dasher. Will you give him orders, Texas Jack?"

"I will," replied the scout. "I reckon them reds are going in just the direction of the Mazetlan mine."

"Perhaps by following them we shall get there sooner," ventured Frank.

"All right, pard! Let us try it," cried Texas Jack, bluffly.

Barney at once took the reins, and the Steam Horse went forward at a rapid gait.

The savages apparently believed that they were being pursued, for they increased their speed tremendously.

But of course the Steam Horse could easily have overtaken them had Frank Reade, Jr., seen fit.

But it did not seem that anything was to be gained by overtaking the savages.

To reach the Los Pinos Mountains was the sole object of the white men.

But suddenly the plain began to undergo a change.

It became less rolling, and merged into a deep and vast sink or depression many miles square.

In the center of this was a large lake.

The white, gleaming waters of the lake looked beautiful indeed in the glimmering light of the sun.

Beyond the sink the distant summits of the hills could be seen.

Texas Jack gave a cry of recognition.

"Hurrah!" he shouted. "This is the Los Pinos Basin. Hyar's whar ther old time Moquis used to come to worship the god of the mirage."

"The god of the mirage!" exclaimed Frank, in surprise.

"Yas."

"What do you mean?"

"Wall, afore we leave this place ye may be able ter see fer yerself. Thar's ther most beautiful mirage comes up in this basin on a hot morning that ye ever seen in yer life."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank. "Then you say the Moquis used to worship here?"

"So they did, cap'en, an' ye'll find the ruins of their temples all around that lake now."

Frank was deeply interested.

"I shall take pleasure in viewing the mirage," he said.

"Wall, ye'll likely have a chance," replied Texas Jack, "but would ye look at them 'Pashes now!"

All saw that the Apaches were making a course around the head of the lake and through the verge of a dense chaparral.

It was evident that their intent was to cross the basin and make for the Los Pinos hills dimly visible.

"I was only here oncet afore in my life," declared Texas Jack, "but I kin remember it well. D'yer see that heap of bowlders out yonder? Wall, I'll bet ye'll find ther graves of two of my pards right under 'em. I buried 'em with my own hands. We stood off twenty 'Pashes the five of us an' licked 'em too."

"Then this is hardly a safe region for the traveler!" exclaimed Frank.

"Safe? Wall, I should say not."

"We will adopt cautious measures. What do you advise?"

The scout was thoughtful a moment.

He glanced back at his faithful horse, Cyclone, which had been galloping back of the wagon all this way.

"Wall," he said, slowly, "mebbe ye want ter push on ter ther hills. But I'm afeard Cyclone an' I will have ter rest hyar for a while."

"We are in no hurry to push ahead," declared Frank. "We may as well stop here until to-morrow."

Texas Jack seemed pleased.

"Good for you, friend!" he cried. "It will be ther best thing we kin do, I reckon. Ye see, darkness is putty close onto us an' we kin push on ter-morrer jest as well."

"Of course," said Frank. "Moreover, I'm anxious to explore this basin before going further."

"Then it's settled!" cried the scout. "I reckon thar's a likely place ter camp over yender by the chaparral."

At a motion from Frank Barney at once turned the Horse in that direction.

In the verge of the chaparral and but a few yards from the sandy shores of the lake camp was made.

Texas Jack cared for Cyclone, his faithful horse.

Then, while Pomp and Barney were preparing the evening meal, he and Frank walked down to the edge of the lake.

The water was as clear as crystal, and of more than ordinary coolness.

"This is a curious kind of a lake!" declared the scout. "It's not easy to tel. jest whar ther water comes from that feeds it. Thar is no visible inlet or outlet."

"May the outlet not be underground?" suggested Frank.

"Wall, that's my belief, pard, an' thar's many curious things about this basin besides this 'ere."

The scout took Frank's arm and led him a few feet to the right of their position.

"D'yee see that island?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Frank, noting a small island in the middle of the lake.

"D'yee see anything peculiar about it?"

"Not particularly!" replied Frank.

The scout laughed softly.

"Wall, now, ye shall come down hyer with me ter-night," he said, "about midnight proper an' then I kin show ye why the Apaches and many a white man, too, believes that it is haunted!"

"Haunted?" gasped Frank.

"Yas."

"What do you mean?"

"Wall, hold yer hosses an' find out. I'll show ye later!"

Frank was puzzled by the scout's strange statement and his peculiar actions as well.

However, at this moment Pomp shouted to them that the evening meal was ready.

CHAPTER III.

PRACTICAL JOKING—THE STORM.

AFTER supper, while Pomp was busy disposing of the remains of the repast and cleaning up his culinary utensils, Frank and Texas Jack took their repeaters and strode away upon an exploring tour around the lake shore.

Darkness was close at hand, but this did not deter them.

Frank was anxious to explore the vicinity.

From their camp they could see the ruins of a number of the Moqui temples, and the young inventor was curious to take a look at them.

As there were no signs of enemies about, it was deemed safe to go.

Barney and Pomp were cautioned to remain by the Steam Horse and not to venture away to any distance.

"Don' yo' be 'fraid, Marse Frank," declared Pomp. "Dat I'ishman he am too skeered of his shadow fo' to go away, an' I don' fink I hab to stay fo' to look aftah him."

Frank and Texas Jack laughed.

But Barney, not to be outdone, retorted:

"Bejabers, it's a foine soldier the naygur is. Shure, the luks av him wud scare away the enemy."

"Golly, don' yo' say nuffin 'bout looks, I'ish," flared Pomp. "If yo' was to hab yo' fotygraf took, dey wud neber dare put it on exposishun. De sight ob it wud jes' gib a sober man de delirungum tremendous."

"Bejabers, av yez dare to insult me, naygur, I'll sphile the face av yez!" cried Barney, belligerently.

"Huh! yo' am'n't no good fo' nuffin," scoffed Pomp. "Jes' yo' go fight wif yo'se'! Dat am all yo' dare do."

Frank and Texas Jack were now out of hearing. It was a golden opportunity for the two skylarkers.

They quickly embraced it.

Barney advanced upon Pomp in a blustering fashion.

"Begorra, av yez don't eat what yez said to me, I'll tache ye manners," he blustered, fiercely.

"Keep away, yo' po' I'ish mick," said Pomp, fingering the dish-rag threateningly.

"Whurroo!" cried Barney, fiercely, "have at yez!"

With that he aimed a crack at Pomp, but the darky dodged.

Quick as lightning came the sequel.

Swish—swash!

The dirty dish-rag took Barney full in the mouth.

As that organ was wide open at the moment a quantity of dishwater and filth went down the Celt's throat.

It nearly strangled him.

He gave a convulsive clutch at the dirty mop, extracted it from his capacious maw and recovered his breath.

Then he let out a terrific Indian yell and made for Pomp.

"Begorra, I'll sphile yer fer that!"

"Ki dar! Look out fo' yo'se', yo' I'ish stuff!"

But Barney was too furious to look out for anything.

He rushed at the darky with blazing vengeance.

But Pomp was ready.

Quick as a flash down went the darky's round woolly head.

Pomp was not Barney's equal in a fist fight, but he could butt like a maddened ram.

The thickness of his skull was something prodigious.

Barney received the full benefit of it full in the stomach.

The result was comical.

The Irishman's wind was completely taken away.

He sat down like a thousand of bricks, and giddy little aerolites and flashing planets oscillated before his bewildered vision.

For a moment he was breathless and completely done out.

But the next moment he was upon his feet.

His turn came now.

With a wild yell, hardly equalled by any Apache savage, he made another break for Pomp.

But the darky was in full retreat.

Down the beach went the two jokers full tilt.

Pomp was a good runner, but Barney was fully as good.

On they ran like two winged deer.

The Celt was eager for revenge, and Pomp was just as eager to escape it.

But retribution was close at hand.

Barney's wrongs were soon to be amply avenged.

Just ahead and hardly seen by Pomp, a little muddy stream emptied into the lake.

Its delta was a treacherous mass of deceptive looking muck and quicksand.

The darky, when within twenty feet of it, saw it and guessed at its character.

But it was too late for him to stop, even if he had dared to.

It was a desperate situation.

There was but one visible means of escape, and that was to leap the muck hole.

Barney saw the treacherous spot and divined Pomp's intention just in time.

He checked his speed at once.

The next moment the darky made a sprawling leap.

It might not have been so difficult a feat for the darky, had not his foot slipped.

That settled his fate.

The next moment down he went floundering and struggling into the dirty water and filthy muck.

It was fully up to his shoulders, and terrified, Pomp splashed about in a desperate fashion.

"Golly, I'se done gwine fo' to sink," he screamed.

"Jes' help dis child out, I'ish. I'se done fo'—fo' suah."

But Barney was not of this opinion.

The Celt thought he had never seen anything so funny in his life, and he was convulsed with boisterous laughter.

"Ho, ho! he, he!" he roared. "Bejabers, that's phwat yez git for sassin' a gentleman!"

"Help! help!" squealed Pomp. "I'se done gwine fo' to drown fo' suah."

The darky held up his hands appealingly.

But Barney would not be fooled.

"Begorra, yez kain't pull me in too, yez cunning old rat!" he cried, scornfully. "Jest yez climb out av yesilf. Ye'kin do it an' I'll never help yez."

"Yo' am a big hog!" blustered Pomp, angrily. "Jes' yo' wait till I does get out!"

With this Pomp up and threw a handful of the slime at his persecutor.

As it chanced Barney's mouth was wide open with laughter at the moment.

The filthy slime struck him full in the mouth and choked him.

Sputtering and gasping, Barney rushed to the lake to wash out the filth from his mouth.

Meanwhile Pomp crawled out of the muck hole.

He was quite unharmed, but a much sadder and wiser negro.

He viewed his bedraggled clothes with disgust.

"I ain' gwine fo' to do any mo' foolin'," he muttered, resolutely. "It am a suttin' fac' dat it don' pay one lily bit."

"Begorra, that's a good resolushun, naygur!" cried Barney, returning from the lake. "Yez allus git de wust of it."

"I doan' git no wuss ob it den yo' does!" spluttered the darky.

"Haw—haw—haw!" roared Barney, "that's a foine thing for yez to say. Shure yez own muther wudn't know yez now!"

Pomp did not offer to argue this point at all.

He started for the lake, pulling off his clothes as he went.

The muck easily washed out of the garments, and after ringing them out quite dry Pomp donned them again for temporary use, until he could return to the wagon and get dry garments.

As he concluded this operation suddenly a distant long roll of thunder was heard.

The western sky was banked high with ominous black clouds.

A terrific storm of the electrical kind was certainly at hand.

"Begorra, I do believe it is goin' ter rain!" cried Barney. "Shure I think we had betther be after getting back to the wagon!"

"Golly, yo' am right, Pish. What would Marse Frank say if he know we had gwine our dis way an' left de Steam Horse all alone?"

Both jokers were not a little alarmed as well as ashamed at this breach of duty.

At once they started on the run to return to the Steam Horse.

Darkness was fast shutting down.

The storm came on with almost incredible swiftness.

In what seemed like a fearfully brief space of time the darkness of night had shut down about them, rain fell in torrents and lightning fierce and jagged played about the cliffs.

Superstitious minds are unable to grasp the realism of a thunder storm.

Both Barney and Pomp were extremely superstitious.

The spasms of terror which seized them were of the most terrible sort.

Loud wailing cries of fear burst from their lips as they stumbled on.

"Massy on us! where am dat Steam Hoss?" wailed Pomp. "Dis chile am done gwine fo' to git his call dis time fo' suah."

"Bejabers, av it ain't the banshee av me forefathers as is bringin' this all about me!" shrieked Barney. "Och hone, phwatively did I leave the Steam Hoss for?"

Paralyzed with awful terror, and scarcely heeding where their footsteps carried them, the two penitent jokers staggered on.

The Steam Horse seemed a great ways distant.

They could not seem to locate it at all. Bewilderment of the most intense kind seized them.

"Och hone, it's lost we are intoirely!" cried Barney.

And the wind hissed and howled and raved, the rain beat mercilessly down upon them.

They were soaking wet, and yet no sign of the Steam Horse.

Thunder rolled in awful reverberations, lightning made jagged paths into the intense darkness.

But yet they could not locate the Steam Horse. Despair had seized them when the culmination came.

Suddenly Barney caught sight of the outlines of the Horse just ahead.

"Shure there it is, naygur!" he cried, joyfully.

But the words had barely left his lips when there was a deep, thunderous roar, the heavens seemed rent, the ground seemed to tremble, and convulsed with terror the two jokers fell upon their faces.

When they regained their feet the storm seemed to wane. In a short while the rain partly ceased, objects about became fairly distinguishable.

Then Barney staggered to the spot where the Steam Horse had been.

"Howly Mither presarve us!" he wailed. "Shure, the Steam Horse is gone intoirely!"

This was certainly the truth.

In some mysterious manner the Steam Horse had vanished.

CHAPTER IV.

MYSTERIOUS MANIFESTATIONS.

FRANK READE, JR., and Texas Jack had made their way along the lake shore with rapid strides.

They had soon left a couple of miles behind them.

They had no thought of danger and had reached one of the Moqui temples when Jack suddenly pointed to the western horizon.

"By ther big bufflers, pard!" he cried, "that looks like a big storm over yonder. I reckon we'd better not stay about hyar fer too long a time!"

"We will start along back very soon," agreed Frank. "I would like to explore this place a bit first."

"All right, pard!"

Texas Jack took a serious look at the sky.

Then with Frank he approached the Moqui dwelling.

It was not a temple, as they had at first supposed, but a curious shaped pueblo.

Frank entered it and began to examine the rude walls and chambers.

"The former home of an extinct race!" he mused, in a thoughtful fashion. "Time has effaced all traces of them save this wretched heap of ruins."

"Wall, I dunno 'bout that," said the scout, doubtfully. "I've heerd it said by old plainsmen thet either a few of the old tribe linger about yer."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank, in surprise; "do you believe that?"

"I ain't prepared ter say. It must be them or ther ghosts."

Frank gazed keenly at the old scout and laughed.

"Come now, Jack," he said, in a chaffing way, "you are not so foolish as to believe in ghosts?"

The scout's features did not change.

"I believe in anything I might be able to see with my own eyes," he declared.

"Well," said Frank, in an amused manner, "what have you seen with your own eyes?"

"Wall, either I have seen the Moquis or their ghosts, I dunno wlich!"

Frank was interested.

He saw that the scout spoke with honest conviction.

"Where have you seen them?" he asked, quietly.

The scout swept his hand toward the lake.

"I've seen 'em out thar!" he declared.

"On the island?"

"No. Walking on ther water from ther mainland to ther island."

"Walking on the water?"

"Yes."

"You are joking?"

"No, I ain't."

"But that is impossible!"

"I allers reckoned it was for human beings. But how about ghosts?"

Frank looked keenly at the scout.

Then he laughed.

"Then you believe they were ghosts?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't."

"Ye don't, eh?"

"No."

"Wall, mebbe ye kin tell what they were then?"

"It was either an optical illusion or else there was some trick about it."

"Wall, what could the trick be?"

"The water might be shallow—"

"Not much. I've measured it to ther depth of forty feet."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes, I do!"

"Well, I must say that is all very strange," said Frank, coolly. "I am much interested. But we'll soon find out about the ghosts."

"Ye'll soon have a chance ter see 'em; that is, if they hain't left these parts."

Frank began to explore the pueblo.

But darkness was coming on rapidly and Texas Jack exclaimed:

"I say, pard, there's a powerful storm coming up from the southwest. Hadn't we better vamose?"

"All right," replied Frank.

But he lingered yet a moment.

It was too late when he came out of the pueblo to hope to reach the Steam Horse before the storm.

The darkness of night had come on with great rapidity.

The thunder rolled and vivid lightning flashed across the heavens. It was a fearful storm indeed, and Texas Jack pulled Frank into one of the pueblo rooms.

"Jericho!" he gasped. "It's a buster, ain't it?"

"You're right," agreed Frank. "Hear that clap of thunder!"

"I reckon it's too heavy to last very long."

"But what will Barney and Pomp do?"

"Do?" exclaimed the scout, sententiously; "don't they know enough ter go in out of the wet?"

"Well, I think so," laughed Frank. "Of course, they will be all safe, and we will not worry about them."

The storm was quickly over, and the intense gloom partly dispelled. Frank and Texas Jack crawled out of the pueblo as soon as they dared.

The scene was now a quiet one.

The storm had passed away to the northward, and the tossing waters of the lake had subsided.

They were now as calm as glass.

And now, from behind the fleecy pile of clouds, the moon, calm and beautiful, emerged.

Her mellow radiance, glinting down upon the surface of the lake, made objects quite plain.

"Ain't that a poooty sight!" cried Texas Jack. "Wall, now, Mr. Reade, what shall we do?"

"What do you mean?" asked Frank.

"Shall we return to the Steam Hoss or stay hyar?"

"If we remain here we will have the wonderful opportunity of seeing the ghosts, will we not?" said Frank, with a laugh.

"Ye're dead right."

"Then we'll stay."

"Ye don't reckon but that ther nigger and ther Irishman are all right?"

"If anything happens to them we will hear from them pretty quick."

Frank was extremely anxious to view the wonderful spiritual manifestations described by the scout.

He did not entertain any fears whatever of Barney and Pomp.

He felt that they were in a safe spot, and it would be just as well to leave them there.

So the matter was settled.

As the time wore slowly by, the two men secreted in the pueblo watched the surface of the lake.

"You don't think the ghost will walk before midnight?" asked Frank.

"I kain't say!" replied the scout; "that will depend on their own notions, I reckon. Ah, what did I tell ye?"

The scout clutched Frank's arm as he spoke.

He pointed out across the lake, and whispered shrilly:

"Look at that!"

Frank did look and beheld a thrilling sight.

Across the surface of the lake certainly there was a ghostly figure walking.

It seemed to trip lightly over the glistening surface of the water straight toward the mysterious island.

Whether human being or disembodied, of course the watchers had no chance of knowing.

But there, across the water, certainly glided a human figure.

Frank Reade, Jr., watched the spectacle quietly, but with deepest interest.

"Wall," exclaimed the scout, triumphantly, "what do ye think of it now?"

The figure glided into the somber shadows of the island and disappeared.

"Upon my soul it is very mysterious," acknowledged Frank.

"Do ye call it a human being?"

"I can't say!"

"Wall, that's what nobody kin say!"

"It may be some clever trick or contrivance very easily explained when once understood."

"Oh, it's possible!" agreed Texas Jack, "but 'tain't probable, pard."

Frank, however, said nothing.

He gripped the stock of his rifle.

The scout seemed to divine his thoughts and said:

"Tain't no use."

"Why?"

"Ye can't hit 'em!"

"That is strange!"

"Mebbe it's ther moonlight or the distance as spoils ther aim, but yer can't t.p. one on 'em over."

"Have you ever tried?"

"Wall, I never did myself, but I've known good men to."

"Why have you never tried?" asked Frank, with surprise.

"Wall, fer one reason I'm much agin takin' human life. In course I dunno but them chaps are enemies, but I ain't dead sure of it. See?"

"Which is certainly humane and just," said Frank, warmly; "however, I think I could drop one of them."

"How are ye going to do it?"

"Why, take good aim."

"What good is yer aim against ther air?"

Frank looked up in surprise.

"Upon my word!" he exclaimed. "I believe that you regard those figures as ghosts!"

"Wall," said Texas Jack, hesitatingly, "I'd like ter know how ye're goin' ter regard 'em as anything else?"

Frank laughed heartily.

"Before we are done, I shall disabuse your mind of that belief," he declared.

"Wall, p'raps ye will," said the scout. "I'm open ter conviction."

"Of course you are."

"Ah, jest look at that!"

Another form had appeared upon the lake.

It walked trippingly over the water's surface and vanished in the shadows of the island.

Then came another and another.

In a very short space of time fully a dozen of the strange beings passed over the surface of the lake to the island.

Frank Reade, Jr., astounded and deeply puzzled, watched the whole transaction.

Texas Jack's face was wreathed in smiles as he watched the young inventor.

"Now what do you think of it?" he asked.

"I hardly know!" replied Frank, in a mystified way.

"Don't ye think they're ghosts?"

"No."

"But however end a human being walk over that lake-like that?"

"I tell you there is some trick about it!"

"Trick? Pshaw! I tell ye they're the ghosts of some of the Moqui Indians that used to live hyer hundreds of years ago. Thar ain't any doubt about it!"

"I'll make a wager that they are human beings!" declared Frank, stoutly. "Tangible flesh and blood. Nothing else!"

"I'll take yer on that."

But Frank had arisen and was boldly walking down to the lake shore.

"Whar are ye going?" asked the scout, in surprise.

"Where am I going?" repeated Frank. "Well, I'll tell you that I am going to solve this mystery. At this particular moment I am about to pay a visit to that island. I will not come back without the truth."

CHAPTER V.

ON THE ISLAND.

TEXAS JACK was dumfounded by this cool declaration. It was some minutes before he could regain his composure.

Then he articulated:

"Jericho! You don't mean it!"

"I mean every word of it!" declared Frank, resolutely.

"But that's great risk—"

"Of course there is. Yet there is no other way. To learn the secrets of that island it must be visited."

"I reckon ye're right."

"Now you can go with me or not, as you choose."

Texas Jack hesitated.

He was a plucky fellow, and the example set by Frank was enough to stimulate him.

"All right!" he cried, impulsively. "I'm with yer!"

"Come on, then!"

Both crept cautiously along the shore of the lake.

Suddenly Texas Jack halted and clutched Frank's sleeve.

"Jericho!" he gasped.

"What is it?" asked Frank.

"Do ye see that?"

"What?"

"A light. Jest squint yer eye through that chaparral on this end of the island."

Frank complied and with a start he saw that the scout was right.

There was a weird, ghastly sort of light flickering through the trees. Shadowy forms seemed flitting about by it, and it certainly looked as if the ghostly visitors to the island were having a gay dance of some kind.

The two men watched the scene intently and with a certain kind of awe.

Texas Jack shivered.

"I reckon if I was you I wouldn't risk going over thar," he said.

"Why?" asked Frank.

"Bekase no good will come of it."

"What harm will come?"

"Ye kain't tell. I don't like foolin' with ghosts an' sich like."

"Well," said Frank, coolly, "you need not incur the risk."

"What are ye going ter do?"

"I'm going over to the island."

"How are ye goin' to git thar?"

"I am going to swim."

Frank was already divesting himself of a part of his clothing.

"Then ye're in real earnest?" exclaimed Jack, shrugging his shoulders.

"Of course I am!"

"That settles it. Thar ain't no man kin dare me to go whar he will."

A moment later they were in the water and swimming slowly toward the island.

It was necessary, of course, to proceed with the utmost caution. Therefore they kept in the shadows and did not splash the water more than was necessary.

Both were good strong swimmers and kept up well.

Gradually the distance decreased and they were soon in shallow water.

They had struck a sand bar which adjoined the upper part of the island, and creeping along this they soon reached the shore.

It was an easy matter to crawl out of the water and up the shore to the cover of the fringe of the chaparral.

"Wall," exclaimed Texas Jack, with a shrug of his shoulders, "hyer we are!"

"Sh!" exclaimed Frank. "Somebody might hear us."

"Yer right!" agreed the scout. "What's the move now?"

Frank was listening intently.

"Keep quiet!" he said, cautiously. "I think I hear voices. Listen!"

Crouching in the verge of the growth of chaparral the two listeners plainly heard the sound of distant chanting.

"Does that sound like ghosts?" asked Frank, triumphantly.

"I dunno," replied the scout, dubiously.

Frank laughed.

"You must disabuse your mind of that idea," he said, "But come, let us move away from here."

Before moving, however, it was necessary to remove and wring the water from such of their garments as they had retained.

This was accomplished, and they donned the wet clothes once more.

The rifles and ammunition, fortunately, they had kept dry by strapping to their backs.

But Frank was eager to move.

They arose to their feet in the dense shadows and were about to plunge into the chaparral when Texas Jack clutched Frank's arm.

"Look!" he gasped.

The young inventor complied and gave a start of surprise.

There in the moonlight across the waters of the lake several more of the shadowy forms were seen walking.

The two white men stood spellbound and watched them until they had reached the island at a point further below.

Texas Jack had twice raised his rifle.

"By hookey!" he exclaimed, excitedly, "I'd jest like ter know whether they're friends or foes. If I thought they were foes, how nice I cud jest pick off a few av 'em."

"I wouldn't risk it!" declared Frank, "although I am very sure they are foes!"

"Wall, if ye're sure——"

"I will retract that statement."

The scout laughed.

"All right, Mister Reade!" he declared. "I'll leave it all with you."

"Very well!" agreed Frank. "I say let us go ahead!"

"I'm with ye!"

At once Frank crept into the chaparral with Texas Jack at his heels.

After a time they came into a narrow path, which seemed to have sufficed as a path to water for some of the animal habitues of the island.

"Wall," whispered Texas Jack, after a few moments of floundering about in the dense growth, "whenever will we git through this 'ere labyrinth?"

"It cannot take a great while," affirmed Frank. "The island is a small one."

"Wall, I should hope so."

But suddenly Frank paused.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?" growled Texas Jack.

"Look yonder!"

The scout did look, and what he saw was an amazing surprise to him.

In the distance, dimly visible through the trees, was a remarkable column of fire, fully ten feet in height.

It seemed to burst spontaneously from the ground, and about it dark forms were seen to be moving.

"That is the light we seen from the shore," whispered Frank.

"Ye're right," agreed Texas Jack. "What the mischief is it?"

"It is very likely some sort of a sacrifice fire. The forms we see are no doubt some of the Moquis moving about."

Texas Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"All right, pard!" he declared. "Mebbe it's all right."

"Of course it is."

"Wall, what's the move?"

"Come on!"

"All right!"

They pushed forward now with great caution. There was certainly need of this for they were undoubtedly within the confines of the enemies' camp.

Frank's strong desire was to get near enough to the incantation scene, for such he believed it to be, to witness the ceremonies.

But he was to experience more difficulties in this than he had yet dreamed of.

Cautiously he moved forward.

Thus far Frank believed that he had been successful in not attracting the attention of the Moquis.

But suddenly his belief received a rude shattering.

There was a sudden startled cry like the wail of a lost spirit.

It echoed through the forest weirdly and shrilly. The result was astonishing.

Quick as a flash the strange column of fire vanished and with it the dark forms.

There was a series of weird and uncanny cries all through the forest and then all was silence.

Texas Jack put a hand on Frank's shoulder, and said:

"Whew! let's get out of hyar. I ain't afeerd of anything that's in the flesh, but I draw her line at ghosts."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Frank, "there are no ghosts about here!"

Yet the young inventor in his own heart was bound to acknowledge that the manifestations were certainly of a ghostly order.

"Wall, if it aint ghosts, what is it?" asked the scout, logically.

"It is the Moquis," exclaimed Frank, impatiently; "don't be foolish, Jack. They have discovered us, that is all!"

"Whar have they gone?"

"That is a question. We must proceed to find that out."

The position in which the two explorers now found themselves would seem to have been a dangerous one.

But, contrary to Frank's expectations, they were not attacked by the Moquis.

The strange beings had disappeared as in a flash of time, and left not a trace behind them.

Frank pushed forward, and in a few moments came out into a little clearing.

It was undoubtedly the spot where the column of flame had been, but not a sign of it was to be seen now.

There was not even a red-hot coal, or spark, or a heap of ashes even, to indicate that there had been a fire in the vicinity.

Certainly this added very materially to the mystery.

What did it mean?

Texas Jack and Frank stood in the center of the clearing, and they were certainly in a quandary.

"It's powerful curus!" exclaimed the scout. "What on airth do ye reckon became of them cusses, Frank?"

"I can't imagine," replied the young inventor.

"Wall, let's see if we can't find out whar that fire was."

Both men advanced to the center of the clearing, and made an examination of the ground.

There was the green turf, but with the aid of a pocket lantern Frank was unable to find any trace of the remains of a fire.

"Wall, I swan!" exclaimed the scout, who was now vastly interested. "What in the deuce kin it mean? I say, friend Reade, let's investigate this matter a little further."

"Of course we will!" replied Frank.

"By ther big bufflers let's find out whether them chaps are really ghosts or not."

"We will ransack the whole island to find them!" cried Frank.

"Wall, go ahead!"

"I think we had better separate. You may go along the east shore and I will meet you at the upper end. What say you?"

Frank waited for an answer but it came not.

A dead silence reigned.

Astounded, the young inventor turned. Texas Jack had mysteriously disappeared. He had vanished as quickly as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up. Frank Reade, Jr., was completely overwhelmed with horror and amazement.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DISTANT WHISTLE.

THE sensations of Barney and Pomp when they discovered, to their horror, that the Steam Horse was gone, cannot be expressed in words.

For some moments the two faithful servitors stood completely dumfounded.

Then Pomp wailed:

"Fo' de Lor', whatebber done become of dat machine? Fo' shuh Marse Frank will nebbet fo'gib dis chile."

"Och hone, shure a sorry day it was whin we went away an' left it!" cried Barney, lugubriously.

But nothing was to be gained by useless repining.

The Steam Horse was certainly gone, and an explanation of its disappearance was not at hand.

Very soon the two practical jokers collected their scattered senses sufficiently to make a search of the vicinity.

It was now quite dark, as the clouds had not yet cleared away to allow the moon to shine forth.

But presently the huge orb of night appeared and illuminated the whole landscape with yellow radiance.

Down upon their hands and knees went the two jokers.

They made quite a startling discovery as they did so.

The tracks left by the wagon were not entirely eradicated by the rain.

There was visible the spot where it had stood.

Near by were tons of rock shattered from the cliff-side by the lightning.

There was one explanation of the disappearance of the Horse which was not wholly illogical.

This was that the shock of the falling rocks had produced sufficient concussion to throw open the throttle.

Barney was confident that this was a clear explanation.

But an idea occurred to Pomp.

"Golly! I jes' has an' idea, l'ish," he exclaimed.

"Phwat is it, naygur?"

"P'raps yo' tell me fus' ting whar am Marse Frank?"

"Av coarse I can't, yez blockhead."

"Well, den, fo' de Lor' sake, I done believe dat we hab jes' been lef' behind fo' to pay us fo' leabin' de Hoss."

"Phwat are yez drivin' at?"

"Don' yo' see nuffin'?"

"Begorra, I'd have to have eyes in the back av me head to see everything yez tell about," spluttered Barney.

"Jes' yo' go easy, l'ish. Dis chile knows what he am about."

"Well, bejabbers, spit it out!"

"Fo' suah. Why amn't it possible dat Marse Frank he return while we am gone an'done go off in dat way?"

Barney scoffed at this.

"Shure, Misher Frank niver wud do the loikes av that!" he cried.

"Huh! how yo' kin tell?"

"Bejabers, I know it."

"Yo' don' know nuffin'!"

"Begorra, naygur, I'll spile the face av yez fer that."

But there was too much serious trouble on hand to permit the jokers to indulge in any joking just now.

It was an extreme necessity to find the Steam Horse.

As near as could be seen the tracks of the wagon led to the westward and toward the Los Pinos Hills.

There seemed no other way but to take the trail and follow it.

If the Steam Horse had run off wild on its account, it was hard telling what its fate was by this time.

There were many things which could befall it.

Barney thought of precipices and deep gulches and shivered.

He already pictured the Steam Horse at the foot of some precipice

a heap of old iron.

The two jokers did not wait for Frank Reade, Jr.

They had no desire to see the young inventor just then.

They feared his displeasure, and only reflected that their first move must be to find the Horse.

So away they started over the level floor of the basin.

Every now and then Barney made an examination of the ground to be sure that they were going in the right direction.

The trail seemed straight as an arrow and directly toward a distant grove of timber.

For hours the two jokers kept on.

They now left the basin behind and entered once more a rolling country.

The Los Pinos Hills now seemed to loom up high and majestic.

"Fo' de Lor!" cried Pomp, "how much furder did dat Hoss go, anyway?"

"Begorra, I won't say a worrud av nothin' has happened to it," declared Barney.

They had already covered fully fifteen miles.

It was well in the night, but yet the moon made objects quite plain. Thus far the trail had not deviated from a straight course.

This was good evidence that no guiding hand was at the throttle. There was little doubt but that the Horse had kept a straight course for the timber belt ahead.

Suddenly Pomp gave a gasping cry.

"What am dat, Fish?" he cried. "Kain't yo' hear nuffin'?"

Barney listened.

"Divil a bit!" he declared. "Shure, me ears are ringing."

Pomp fell upon his face on the ground and listened intently.

"Come!" he said, briefly. "I don't fink we're pretty nigh de Horse, Fish."

"Begorra, phwat do yez mean?" exclaimed Barney in amazement.

"Jes' yo' hol' on, Fish, and I show yo' pretty quick."

Together they pushed on over the prairie rapidly for some ways.

A mile was quickly covered.

Then Pomp halted.

"Jes' yo' listen now, Fish!" he cried. "If yo' kain't hear anyling now you're no good!"

The Celt did listen.

There was no mistake now.

Plainly to the hearing of both came a distant sharp and long drawn wail.

It was a perpetual cry and as Barney gazed at Pomp he gasped:

"Rejabers, it's that blasted whistle a-whoopin' her up!"

"You're right, Fish!" cried the darky.

"Bejabers, then no harrum kin 'av come to the Stheam Hoss?"

"Of co'se not!"

"Phwere the devil wud yez say it was, anyway?"

"Fo' suah, I done fink it am in dat clump ob trees yonder!"

"Begorra, then let us be off afther it."

Away the two jokers went at full speed.

There was need of their hurrying, and the same thought was in the minds of both.

If the prowling Apaches should hear the whistle, and it would be miraculous if they did not, they would be sure to investigate.

Should the Steam Horse fall into the hands of the Apaches, the result certainly would be serious.

There was no doubt but that they would hack it to pieces.

So Barney and Pomp ran on at full speed, hoping to reach the Horse first.

Nearer drew the shrill blast of the tiresome whistle.

"Bejabers, av all ther steam ain't blowed off it'll be a wondher!" cried Barney.

On they ran.

But suddenly both became oppressed with a thrill of horror.

"Golly, we am done fo'!" groaned Pomp, in despair.

"Phwat do yez mean?"

"Jes' yo' look yender."

Barney did look.

Between them and the belt of timber full half a hundred mounted forms were seen.

They were Apaches beyond doubt, and were making for the Steam Horse.

A great cry of despair burst from Barney.

"Och hone, we're lost intoirely," he cried. "Shure, naygur, we'd better die now."

But Pomp was strangely cool.

"Jes' yo' keep quiet, Fish," he declared. "Dar may be a way yet fo' fool 'em."

"Begorra, mebbe yez kin show it to me?"

"Golly! I se gwine to try!"

Pomp began to make his way cautiously over the prairie to an elevation near.

They were now quite near to the timber belt.

Upon gaining the elevation they were enabled to look down upon the scene with ease.

A startling scene it was.

In a semi-circle the Apache warriors on their horses were surrounding the Steam Horse, which head on had run into the thick underbrush of the timber, and there, the wheels becoming clogged, it had been brought to a stop.

The whistle was still going, and at times the resistance of the steam in the cylinder would set the wheels to whirring.

The Apaches were evidently dumfounded at the spectacle.

In the moonlight so clear and bright every detail could be seen.

The savages seemed afraid to approach the Steam Horse.

It was more than likely that they feared an ambush or trick of some kind.

But they would try at times to drown the whistle with their wild yells.

Then a flight of arrows would rattle against the iron sides of the Horse.

But finally as there was no retaliation they ventured to approach nearer.

"Golly sakes! Whatebber am we gwine ter do?" cried Pomp.

It was really a ludicrous thing to watch the maneuvers of the savages.

Very cautiously they approached the object of their curiosity.

But soon they became satisfied that there was nobody in the wagon. This emboldened them to at once rush about the Steam Horse.

The scene which followed was amusing as well as thrilling.

Barney and Pomp could hear the jabbering of the Apaches quite plainly.

To their surprise the savages did not seem inclined to do the Steam Horse any injury.

To the contrary it seemed to be their desire and purpose to take possession of it as the white man had.

A couple of the savages were seen to climb into the wagon.

A number of them burned their hands upon the boiler, and one of them abandoned an attempt to feel of the whistle which was going so fiercely.

It was evident that the savages were at a loss how to shut off the whistle, or how to set the Steam Horse going.

This seemed to be their ambition.

Suddenly a number of them seized hold of the rear wheels of the wagon and began to pull on them.

In a few moments they had pulled the wagon and Horse out of the dense underbrush.

CHAPTER VII.

USELESS PURSUIT.

"SHURE, there'll be the devil to pay now!" cried Barney.

The Celt was right.

The savages had got the Horse out of the forest entanglement, but they had not closed the throttle.

They dragged the wagon out clear from the brush and swung the rear end about.

This headed the horse due south.

Two of the savages were in the wagon.

They were jabbering excitedly, and apparently giving orders.

It had not been difficult for the redskins to pull the Steam Horse out of the underbrush.

But now, with a full head of steam gathering every moment, the Steam Horse took a sudden plunge forward.

In vain they strove to hold the iron steed.

The impetus was gained, and the Steam Horse went forward like a resistless thunderbolt.

Savages were hurled right and left like puppets.

The two in the wagon appeared terrified, but hung on for dear life.

Away went the Steam Horse to the southward like a streak of lightning. Nothing seemed able to stop it.

Over a roll in the prairie it went and out of sight.

Barney and Pomp were intensely excited, but powerless.

"Begorra, the Horse has given the spalpeens the slip after all!" cried the Celt. "Shure, av we cud only sthop it now!"

But this was out of the question.

The Apaches seemed overwhelmed with amazement for a time, and appeared to be wholly unable to act.

Then, as with one consent, they sprang to saddle and dashed away over the plain in pursuit.

Soon Steam Horse and savages all were out of sight.

Barney and Pomp were left alone upon the prairie.

For a few moments neither spoke.

It was a genuine problem now to know just what move to make.

"Shure, it's left intoirely we are!" finally Barney cried. "I never felt worse about anything in me loife."

"Fo' massy's sake, Fish, whatebber shall we do?"

It was certainly a conundrum.

But Barney, quick-witted Irishman that he was, was not long without an idea.

He saw below in the moonlight a couple of the Indian ponies grazing quietly.

They belonged to the two savages aboard the Steam Wagon.

At once it occurred to the Celt to secure the ponies and continue the pursuit of the Steam Horse.

He broached the idea to Pomp.

"Golly! dat am a'righ't if yo' kin catch 'em," cried the darky.

"On me worrud, it's not much good we are if we can't!" cried Barney.

The Celt had at his belt a horsehair lariat.

This he swung over his arm and went down upon the moonlit plain.

Approaching the ponies cautiously, he soon had the lariat over the neck of one of them.

It was an easy matter to leap into the Indian saddle and lasso the other.

Pomp was on hand at once.

Mounted upon the ponies, they started at once after the Steam Horse.

Neither had yet abandoned hopes of getting possession of the Horse once more.

They rode on at full speed.

But the Indians and the Steam Horse had got the start of them, and it did not seem possible to overtake them.

However, they rode on for miles.

Daylight was now breaking.

The trail could be plainly seen, and to the great dismay of the two servitors it led directly into the Los Pinos Hills.

Soon they came to a tract of rocky soil, where the coarse gravel and stone completely hid the trail.

It was flatly impossible to follow it further.

Barney and Pomp were much dismayed.

"Golly, what am we gwine to do now?" cried the darky, in distress.

"Begorra, we're busted," was Barney's laconic rejoinder.

"Don' doubt that, I'sh, not de leastest bit. Massy on us! What ebber will be de end ob all dis anyway?"

But there was no use in wasting time there or crying over spilt milk.

Certainly the only method was to push on at random.

This they proceeded to do.

Once Barney thought of going back for Frank Reade, Jr. But he had not the moral courage to do that.

The two jokers were truly in a miserable frame of mind.

Neither could have been induced to play a joke at that moment, no matter how good the opportunity.

The affair had sobered them completely. Two dejected looking individuals they certainly were.

But they pushed on into the hil's now.

There was a deep cut or gorge that extended between the two high crowned hills.

It looked reasonable that the Steam Horse had gone in this direction.

At least it was the straight course, and they took it.

For fully a mile they kept on.

Then Pomp dropped from his pony's back with a cry of joy.

He picked up a bright vari-colored serape. It was of the kind wove and worn by the Apaches.

That it had been dropped by one of them was certain.

It looked as if they were on the right track, and both felt reassured.

"Golly! I reckon we soon ober take dem if we keeps on!" cried Pomp.

"Howly Mither, I belave yez, naygur!" replied Barney.

On they rode at a full gallop.

But soon they came to a point where the gorge narrowed.

Here a thrilling incident was in store for them.

Suddenly both ponies halted short with snorts of alarm.

For a moment Barney and Pomp were wholly at a loss to account for this.

But the next moment it became plain enough. Down into the trail there descended a monster form.

There, crouching full in their path, was a monster specimen of the savage mountain lion.

This most derided animal of the southwest lay upon the ground in a crouching position, waving its tail fiercely and glaring at them.

The two ponies stood in fear and trembling and were with difficulty controlled.

"Och hone! Wud yez luk at the horrid baste!" cried Barney in alarm.

"Massy on us!" screamed Pomp. "It am a big panther, an' he hab us fo' suah, I'sh."

"Shut up, yez blatherin' fool!" cried Barney, excitedly. "Shure we kain't turn back now. We must go troo dat path."

"Fo' de Lor' sakes, don' yo' try it," cried Pomp. "It neber wud do. Yo' will git killed fo' suah!"

"Bejabers, it's ther bloody panther I'll be after killin'," cried Barney, drawing his rifle from over his back. "Have at yez, yez ugly lukin' brute!"

With this the Celt fired.

His aim was not bad, but for some reason or other it did not lay out the panther.

In fact a panther is well known to be a hard animal to kill.

The bullet probably only wounded and infuriated the beast.

The next moment it uttered a tremendous roar and came for the Celt like a thunderbolt.

Barney was quick and agile in his movements.

If he had not been, that moment would have been his last.

The panther had sprung for the pony's back.

Barney saw in a flash that his shot had missed, and he knew that to fall into the panther's clutches meant death.

So, quick as a flash, he dropped from his pony's back.

The next moment the panther's body struck the game little pony in the neck.

The pony went to the ground like a bullet, and the panther's huge jaws were set deep in the little animal's spinal column.

It was all over with the pony in an instant.

But Barney had escaped, and had ran with all speed to Pomp's side.

"Golly, jes' let's git out ob dis at once!" cried the darky, fearfully.

"Bejabers, give us yer gun, ye misfit monkey!" cried Barney.

Pomp yielded up his gun without another word.

Quick as a flash, Barney drew another bead upon the panther.

The Celt had certainly shown great pluck in the contest.

Crack!

This time the Irishman's aim was good.

The bullet sped true to the mark and struck the panther full in the chest.

The bullet must have penetrated at once to a vital spot.

The huge beast made a convulsive leap in the air and then fell in a heap. There was a convulsive tremor and then all was over.

The panther was dead.

"Whurroo!" yelled Barney. "Shure it's mesilf as laid the baste out, bad luck ter his ugly carcass!"

"Yes, but yo' hain't no lily pony no mo'," cried Pomp; "how am yo' gwine fo' to trabble now?"

This was the truth and made Barney look a bit glum.

But the Celt was naturally light of spirit, and cried recklessly:

"Bejabers, I kin yet ride with Shank's mare, an' it'll not be the forst toime ethyer."

Then he went up and began to stroke the panther's skin.

"Shure it's mighty well I'd loike to have that fur for a rug in me front hall at home!" he cried. "None av the aristocracy have anything better nor that."

"Golly, yo' am right, I'sh, but I don' fink we am wastin' time yer."

"All roight, naygur. If yez will lead on I'll folly yez."

"Huh!" sniffed Pomp. "I done fink yo' wnd neber be in mah sight. I tol' yo' what, I'sh, yo' must climb up on dis yer pony's back wif me."

"Bejabers, he'll never howld us!"

"Don' yo' fink so."

The attempt was made, however, and with success.

Of course the pony could only go with moderate speed. They had barely started, however, when they were given a shock of surprise.

There was a clatter of wheels, and looking up the gorge, Barney cried wildly:

"Be me sowl, naygur, it's ther Steam Horse, an' devil a bit do I know who it is a-dhrivin' av it."

This was the truth.

A white man was at the dasher, and he seemed to handle the Horse with perfect ease.

But it was not Frank Reade, Jr., nor Texas Jack, but a perfect stranger to Barney and Pomp.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNDERGROUND.

THE feeling which came over Frank Reade, Jr., when he discovered the disappearance of Texas Jack in so mysterious a manner, was one of cold chilling terror.

There was no possible way that the scout could have retreated into the cover of the trees.

He had been at Frank's shoulder just a moment previous.

Now he was out of sight.

He had vanished as if of vapor, and not a trace was left behind.

"Heavens!" gasped Frank. "Where is he?"

Then he raised his voice.

"Jack! Where are you?"

The inventor imagined that the answer came back from a muffled distance.

But what it was he could not tell.

Impressed with a sense of superstition such as his nature was foreign to, Frank started to leave the dell.

But all in that moment an unearthly cry went up from a point by the lake shore.

It echoed in quavering notes among the tree tops, and sent a grave-yard chill of horror into Frank's bosom.

"Heavens!" he gasped. "It is not difficult to believe that this treat does belong to the devil himself."

But the practical part of Frank's nature asserted itself.

He was determined to, if possible, learn the mystery of the place.

Therefore, he made a leap forward and ran for the shore.

Bursting through the shrubbery, he came out upon the white sands.

It was just at the moment that a shadowy figure started to walk out on the surface of the lake.

"Man or ghost, I'll stop him!" muttered Frank, resolutely.

His first impulse was to use his revolver. But he desisted.

His next move was to make a tremendous leap forward and grab the unknown.

Clutching him with both hands, Frank cried:

"Hold on, my friend. I want to find out who and what you are."

Frank had hold of a tangible form, and in a moment was wrestling with a person somewhat his inferior in strength.

With a quick movement he tore away the cowl shading the face, and beheld the features of a Moqui Indian.

He was certainly flesh and blood, and only a Moqui Indian.

The first surmise was correct after all.

The mysterious inhabitants of the region were no others than a remnant of the once powerful band of Moquis, cliff dwellers and pueblo builders.

So astonished was Frank that he relaxed his grip for a moment.

Quick as a flash the Moqui, with a peculiar animal-like cry, broke away and vanished in the gloom.

The young inventor did not pursue.

He was amazed.

"Well, I never!" he muttered. "I can understand now what all this hocus-pocus business means. These Moquis live here in the basin, and adopt these ghostly actions to work upon the superstitious fears of the Apaches, their foes, and frighten them away."

There was no doubt of the correctness of this surmise.

But Frank was not yet satisfied.

He advanced to the edge of the water and reached down under the surface.

His hand at once encountered the strands of a finely woven lariat bridge, which was less than an inch below the surface of the lake.

It was upon this that the cunning Moquis crossed and gave the illusion of walking spirit-like upon the water.

"Clever!" muttered Frank. "I think I understand now."

But Frank knew that the Moquis were never warlike, and he felt no more fear while on the island.

He reflected that the strange natives would not harm him, if he did not do them an injury, which he had no idea of doing.

But the mysterious disappearance of Texas Jack was not yet explained.

Frank was determined to solve this problem at any cost.

He did not attempt to do any harm whatever to the lariat bridge. He allowed it to remain and started to return to the clearing where he had last seen Texas Jack.

There was a half hope in the young inventor's bosom that he might encounter another of the Moquis.

If he should happen to, he was resolved to hold the fellow and endeavor to make terms with the strange people.

But as far as could be seen or heard there were none of them about.

All was the stillness of the grave upon the isle.

Frank walked quickly into the clearing where he had last seen Texas Jack.

"Jack!" he exclaimed, in a sharp tone of voice. "If you are about here speak to me."

But no answer came back.

The night wind soughed mournfully through the trees.

A distant coyote's howl was heard, but that was all.

If ever he was mystified in his life, Frank Reade, Jr., was now.

What could it all mean? What had become of Texas Jack?

He was wholly at a loss to understand any of these things.

But a thrilling change in affairs, and of which he was little aware, was at hand.

It came upon him suddenly and he was unprepared for it.

He crossed the dell to the spot where he had stood with Texas Jack, intending to examine the ground.

But suddenly he experienced a shock, felt the ground give way beneath him and shot downward out of sight like a flash.

For a moment Frank thought he was sliding to the center of the earth, so rough and violent was his passage.

Then he brought up with a stunning thump and his brain whirled like a top.

The chief question uppermost in his mind was "where am I?" This was not answered at once.

All around him was Stygian darkness.

What could he do? He hardly dared move in any direction.

He sat still and allowed his scattered senses to collect themselves.

Then he began to reflect upon the possibility of his having fallen into an underground passage.

He reflected that this whole region was no doubt literally honey-combed in every direction.

Then came the question as how he was to find his way out, and whether this were possible or not.

He understood perfectly well now the mysterious disappearance of Texas Jack.

But had the scout also fallen into the same cavern?

With the thought Frank raised his voice, and cried:

"Texas Jack, are you in hearing?"

The reply came sharp and clear.

"Wall, I'll be blowed! Is that you Frank Reade, Jr.?"

"That is who it is!" replied Frank.

"Wall, I swan! How did you come down here too? Jest ther same way I did, I reckon."

"Yes, I think I did. The ground gave way under my feet, and down I went."

"Jes' so. Whar in tarnation are we?"

"Give it up!"

"Air you badly hurt?"

"No, I think not."

"Wall, I ain't nuther, beyond a leetle crick in ther back. Have ye got a match?"

"Yes."

"Let's have a bit of light then, an' see what kind of a hole this mought be that we've tumbled inter!"

"I have got what is better," declared Frank.

"An' what's that?"

"It's a pocket lantern."

"By hookey, that's good luck!"

Frank produced the pocket lantern and lit it. The scene revealed to the gaze of the entombed men was a strange one.

The arches of the cavern were about them. Above could be seen the apertures through which they had fallen.

They were too far up to think of reaching them.

Escape in that direction was out of the question.

"Heavens!" gasped Frank, in horror. "Unless we can find a way out of this place, it is certain that we are entombed alive!"

Texas Jack was so deeply impressed with this evident fact that his face turned pale.

"Ye're right, pard!" he agreed. "But come, let's get out of hyar, if we kin. Thar's no telling whar this cave goes ter."

"Surely nothing is to be gained by remaining here," agreed Frank. "We can never return the way we came."

With this decision they started away through the cavern.

As they went on they encountered no evidences that the cavern had ever been explored.

Before them ever were spread the same arches, passages and cavern chambers.

There seemed literally no end to them, and for hours they kept on. But thus far they had seemed only to get deeper into the earth.

At length Texas Jack halted.

"By hookey, pard!" he gasped, wiping the sweat from his brow, "I hain't had sich an experience as this 'ere fer years. Whar in tarnation are we gettin' too, anyway?"

"Well, that is a problem!" said Frank, not without a twinge of despair. "I am afraid we're lost!"

Texas Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"That means a good deal, pard."

"Death!"

Both men exchanged startled glances.

"I can't exactly say that I'm afraid to die!" declared the scout, "but I'd a heap sight ruther die with my boots on out yer on ther prairies."

"So had I!" declared Frank; "but let us not give up hope but push on."

With this they kept on.

It must have been long after daylight, as Frank discovered upon looking at his watch.

They had very likely covered fourteen or fifteen miles underground, and were for aught they knew wholly lost.

It did not look encouraging for an escape from the place. To perish in such a manner was a frightful thing to contemplate.

But suddenly a gasping cry escaped the scout.

"Look!" he cried. "What do ye call that pard?"

Down one of the cavern passages in the distance was seen a gleam of daylight.

It was like the rays of a beacon lamp to the lost mariner.

"Saved!" gasped Frank Reade, Jr. "Luck is with us, Jack."

"By hookey! I believe ye're right," cried the scout, excitedly.

Both without a moment's further delay started toward the light. Though they little dreamed it a thrilling surprise was in store for them.

CHAPTER IX.

ENTRAPPED.

The surprise of Barney and Pomp to see the Steam Horse in the hands of a stranger may well be imagined.

The two faithful servitors stood spellbound gazing at the sight.

The occupant of the wagon being a white man, they did not attempt to beat a retreat.

But they stood gaping with sheer wonderment at him.

"Howly Mither!" gasped Barney, in the sheerest of amazement.

"Phwativer can all av that mean?"

"Golly! I done fink dat am de queerest sing I eber heerd tell ob!" exploded Pomp.

It was certainly a strange thing.

But at that moment the driver of the Steam Horse saw them.

At once he closed the throttle and applied the brake.

He waved a hand to them as the Steam Horse came to a stop.

"Shure, it's saved we are!" cried Barney, joyfully. "He's a frind to us, naygur!"

"Golly, amn't we in heaps ob luck," cried the darky.

The Steam Horse was now at a standstill. The white man opened the wagon door and sprang out.

"Hello, friends!" he cried. "Welcome to you!"

"Begorra, the same to yez!" cried Barney. "Shure an' ye've saved the Steam Horse for us!"

"You don't mean it! Is this machine your property?"

"Shure an' it is that!"

"Well, then I am glad, indeed, to see you. My name is Jack Howard. Who are you?"

"I am Barney O'Shea, an' I'm in the employ av Misther Frank Reade, Jr., who is the real owner."

"What! Frank Reade, Jr.! I have heard of him. Is he not a famous inventor?"

"Shure, that is he, sor."

"Ah, now I see; and you two are Barney and Pomp?"

"That we are!"

"Well, I'm glad to see you. Get aboard at once. I'll take you out of here by a safe way. There's a big crowd of savages just coming into the pass."

"Shure yez don't mean it!" cried Barney, excitedly; "if yez know the way out shure yez may dhrive ahead!"

"Well, I do!"

"All roight thin. But howiver did yez iver get possession av the Horse?"

"Ah, that is a nice little tale which I shall have to tell you!" said the stranger, in a glib manner. "You see, I was over in the valley stalking a deer when I heard a great rumpus. I looked around and I saw the Steam Horse coming like a locomotive.

"Well, I couldn't make up my mind what it was at first. For a moment I reckoned that some locomotive on the Union Pacific had strayed from the rails and got down here some way. But then I re-

membered being down in Texas two months ago and hearing tell of a Steam Horse that some big gun of an inventor had down there.

"Wall, I reckoned that this was the same Steam Horse. Thar was a hull tribe of Injuns follerin' it whoopin' and yellin' like mad."

"I saw how the thing had happened at onct. I reckoned as how the Horse had got away from ye and was running amuck. But the question was, how was I to circumvent them Injuns?"

"Wall, I jest up with my rifle in my quandary an' fired a shot at ther Hoss. Would ye believe it, it struck him in the jaw and closed the throttle."

"Ther Hoss came to a stop not fifty yards away. I put in my licks an' got thar afore the reds. I used to be locomotive engineer on the old Pennsylvania Railroad, an' I knew jest how ter set ther machinery goin'. I turned ther Hoss about, gin ther reds a good race an' come hyer, as you see."

Barney and Pomp had listened with great interest.

They did not for a moment doubt this yarn of Jack Howard's.

It was certainly all very plausible except perhaps the wonderful rifle shot, and this they overlooked.

"Bejabers, Misther Howard, yez done well!" cried Barney. "Shure, it's a gentleman ye are!"

"Yo' am jes' suah dat Marse Frank he neber fo'git yo' fo' dis," declared Pomp.

"That is all right," said Howard, with a queer grimace. "Let's all pile aboard and get out of here!"

"Didn't yo' say de Injins was comin' dat way?" asked Pomp.

"Yes," replied Howard. "We will go back into the valley."

"But am't dey in dat direckshun too?"

"Sure, but you see I know a good way out of here just a little ways above. We can easily make it ahead of the reds and outwit them neat and clean."

"A'right, sah!"

Without the least bit of suspicion or hesitating Barney and Pomp climbed into the wagon.

"Whar did you leave Mr. Reade?" asked Howard.

Barney told him.

"Who was with him?"

"A gemman named Texas Jack."

Howard gave a quick start.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, in a peculiar harsh voice, "he is a scout, is he not?"

"Begorra, I believe he is, sor!"

Howard muttered something under his breath. Then he opened the throttle and the Steam Horse went up the gorge at rapid speed.

Soon the valley spoken of lay before them.

But somewhat singularly not a savage was in sight.

Barney could not help expressing his surprise at this.

"How do yez make that out?" he cried, in amazement. "Phwherever have the devils gone to?"

"Well, that is curious!" rejoined Howard. "But don't be too sure. They may be hiding in that long grass over yonder."

"Begorra, I think I'll have me rifle all ready!" declared Barney.

"I finks jes' de same," said Pomp.

But both were rewarded with surprise.

Not one of the weapons could be found. The wagon did not seem to hold a firearm.

"What's the matter?" asked Howard, sharply.

"Fo' goodness sake!" gasped Pomp. "Where am my rifle gone to?"

"An' mine too, bejabers!" cried Barney.

"Can't ye find 'em?"

"Divil a bit!"

"Never mind, you may not need to use them. I reckon the savages took them."

But Barney and Pomp were wholly mystified by the singular state of affairs.

"Dat am de strangest fing I'se heerd tell ob yit!" cried Pomp. "P'raps dem two Ingines what was in dis yer waggin mought hab took dem away!"

"Of course they did!" cried Howard, impatiently. "It can't be helped now!"

But Barney and Pomp were far from being satisfied.

From that moment a species of distrust palled upon them.

"I done fink we had bettah go back an' fin' Marse Frank jes' as quick as we can!" declared Pomp.

"All right!" agreed Howard. "We will do that."

"But yo' amn't goin' in de right direckshun fo' dat."

"Oh, yes, I am," declared Howard. "We will soon get out of the valley!"

"Golly, but dou' yo' see dat we should go in de opposite direckshun fo' to do dat?"

"Ah, but the Apaches are in the gorge and would stop us!"

The Steam Horse was going across the valley at lightning speed.

Barney and Pomp were wholly at a loss to know just what to do.

They were very uneasy and half tempted to assert authority.

But Howard's manner seemed so honest withal, that they could not bring themselves to do it.

The Steam Horse was now very near a break in the hills.

Soon it shot into this and then all in a flash of time a startling scene burst upon the vision of the two servitors.

They were instantly brought into a large, square alcove in the mountain side, high walled on all sides but one.

There were rude wigwams scattered about, the long sluices of a

mining flume ran into a stream near, and there were mining tools scattered about.

Also to the surprise and horror of Barney and Pomp, fully a hundred armed and painted Apaches were lounging about the camp.

"Golly fo' glory, massy sakes alive!" exploded Pomp, leaping to his feet. "Where am yo' takin' ob us, Marse Howard? Don' yo' see where we am?"

"Begorra, it's the Apaches," howled Barney. "Shure it's kilt we are intoirely already, an' niver a way to escape. Och hone! turn the Horse about at once!"

But Howard had closed the throttle and turned like a panther.

A revolver gleamed in each hand, and in a voice of thunder he cried:

"Hold where you are. Hands up or you are dead men!"

Too late Barney and Pomp saw the treachery of the move.

"Fo' de Lor's sakes!" gasped Pomp. "Who am yo', sah?"

"Who am I?" cried their treacherous captor, with a jeering laugh.

"Well, it will make you smile when I tell you. Did you not see that?"

He touched a long black plume in his wide sombrero.

"Bejabers, I know!" gasped Barney. "I heard Mr. Texas Jack tellin' about Black Plume."

"You are right!" said the white renegade, with a smile; "that is just what I am."

At this moment the Steam Horse was surrounded by the excited Apaches.

"Take them out and bind them!" was Black Plume's order.

It was instantly obeyed.

The two white prisoners were led out into the open and quickly bound.

They were surrounded by a hideous gang of the cruellest savages on the face of the earth, the Apaches.

They realized this well, and their hearts sank within them.

It seemed truly as if their fate was sealed.

"May the Howly Vargin presarve us!" groaned Barney. "Phwhat-iver will Misther Frank think av all this?"

But Black Plume advanced at this moment.

There was a scornful light in his keen eyes, as he said:

"So Mr. Frank Reade, Jr., thought he could trick me out of the Mazetlan Mine, did he? Well, he has made a bit of a mistake, and he will find it out."

Indeed, this seemed true.

Neither Barney nor Pomp felt that they were in a position to deny it. With the Steam Horse and both of them in the power of the unscrupulous foe, the outlook was most certainly a dreary one.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE CAVE.

As Frank Reade, Jr., and Texas Jack drew nearer to the gleam of daylight they had no thought whatever of the surprise in store for them.

As they went on the light grew broader and soon objects about became more visible.

The next moment they came into the mouth of the cavern and saw the daylight all about them.

Through the mouth of the cave they saw the walls of a pass.

But what suddenly claimed their attention and gave them a shock of surprise was the sight of six long poles stacked in the center of the cave.

A second glance revealed them as ancient halberds of Spanish make and rusted and begrimed with time.

But the next object that met their gaze was more thrilling.

Beneath the halberds lay the whitened bones of a skeleton.

The skeleton was that of a human being, and pieces of rusty armor, a lance head, shield, and heavy sword were intermingled with it.

Not far from this skeleton was another. Beyond that another.

Frank counted six of the skeletons, one to each halberd in the stack.

"By hookey!" gasped Texas Jack. "Did ye ever see anything like that?"

"They are the remains of an ancient party of explorers," declared Frank. "Spaniards beyond a doubt. They probably lost their way and starved to death in this terrible place. What a tragedy!"

At this moment Texas Jack touched the stacked halberds, and the poles crumbled into a heap of rotten wood.

Only the dry air of the cavern had enabled time to preserve them for so great a space.

There was little doubt but that the remains had been there for two centuries and a half or more.

"I should judge that these were Spanish adventurers in search of gold," cried Frank. "For some reason or other they crawled in here to die."

But Frank chanced to emerge into the pass at this moment and held a startling sight.

The pass at the other end terminated in a precipitous wall of rock.

The lower end, however, had been walled up to a great height and in this wall there had been set a heavy barred gate.

The bars were of heaviest iron and such as might resist the strongest attempt to break them, being fully two inches thick and welded at every cross.

"Heavens!" gasped Frank in amazement. "Here is a bit of evidence that these men were enforced prisoners."

Texas Jack gazed at the heavy bars dumbfounded.

"Barred in!" he ejaculated.

"That is it!"

"Then I reckon these poor chaps were barred in here to starve to death."

"It looks that way!"

The two explorers looked at each other for a moment in amazement.

"Wall, that beats me!" exclaimed Texas Jack. "Who'd ever think of finding such a den as this in these hills?"

"Sure enough!"

"But how do we know that we ain't barred in ourselves?"

Texas Jack advanced and gave one of the bars a sharp blow. In an instant it crumbled and fell.

The rust of centuries had disintegrated it, and it was easily displaced with the slightest blow.

But Frank had gone back to search the prison cave.

"I am interested in this affair," he declared. "I want to see if I can find an explanation of it all."

He searched not long before his efforts were rewarded.

In the soft limestone of the cave he found an inscription etched apparently with the point of a sword.

It was done in Spanish, which we will render translated for the benefit of the reader:

"A. D. 1592. God defend the just. I, Sebastian De Romero, with five companions, through the treachery of Don Miguel De Cardez, have been thrown into this terrible dungeon to die a horrible death. To whomever shall find these bones here find explanation.

"From Spain we sailed for the New World three years gone by. Adventures we have had of many sorts in our search for gold. At last after months of toil we have found it. Gold—gold—enough to buy the crown of Castile. But Miguel de Cardez has had reason to hate us. In an evil moment he poisoned the minds of our companions and induced them to seize us and throw us into this dreadful place to die.

"But in a pit outside of here we have buried gold—a vast treasure—fearing that Miguel and his crew would get it. We hope to escape and yet reap the treasure, for Miguel and the others are gone, but if we die here, then, to whomever finds our bones, obey the following directions:

"Go to the rock of the Virgin, which overlooks the Salt Lake. There, fifty meters to the westward, by a flat stone, dig. Four feet of earth covers it all. If it be our fate to die in this accursed place, may you, kind stranger, for the reward give our bones decent burial. May the Holy Mother preserve you, is the prayer of Don Sebastian De Romero!"

Frank deciphered this, and translated it in full to Texas Jack.

Frank was a fine Spanish scholar, and therefore had no trouble in doing this.

The scout listened with interest and amazement.

"By hookey!" he cried, "that beats anything I ever heerd of! What d'yer think of it, pard?"

Frank's face was aglow.

"I have but one belief," he said.

"What?"

"We have found the Mazetian Mine. We are in luck!"

Texas Jack gave his thigh a hearty slap and leaped in the air.

"By hookey, I believe ye!" he cried. "This is ther old Spanish mine that is lawfully the property of Bill Barstow!"

"Exactly."

"It'll make Bill's widow happy."

"I hope so."

"In course it will. But what's ther next move?"

Texas Jack was so excited that he hardly knew what he doing.

"Suppose we first find our way out of here and do a little looking around?" suggested Frank.

"Go ahead."

It was easy to break their way through the barred gate.

Making their way over shaly ground for some ways the two explorers came out of the pass.

They were at the base of high, precipitous cliffs.

Just below, in a little basin, was a small lake, and it was no doubt the Salt Lake mentioned in Don Romero's narrative.

Frank regarded it curiously and then began to look around for the Virgin Rock.

This he was not sure of being able to locate.

But Texas Jack suddenly cried:

"Heigho, pard! don't that look a bit like it?"

The scout pointed along the hillside to a peculiar-looking pillar of rock.

It was not difficult to see the outlines of a woman's form in the natural contour of the stone.

Beyond doubt it was the Virgin Rock.

To be sure, it did not bear any too great a resemblance to the Virgin at this date, yet two and a half centuries previously it might have looked vastly different.

At any rate it was without doubt the rock alluded to.

With interest now at fever height, the two men paced off the distance required to the westward.

But no flat stone was to be seen.

An idea occurred to Frank.

He thumped the ground carefully with his heel, and striking a spot more solid than the rest with the blade of his hunting knife, began to rip off the turf.

Sure enough, there plainly revealed was the flat stone.

Time had caused the turf to grow over it.

Frank and the scout sat looking inquiringly at each other.

Then Frank said:

"What shall we do?"

"Dig!"

"But we haven't any tools!"

"Never mind, it ain't only four feet. A knife is good enough." That settled it.

Both went to work lustily.

Soon a deep hole had been dug. Deeper they made it, until Frank was satisfied that they had gone down four feet.

"This is the limit," he said. "We haven't hit the right spot!"

"Hold on, pard!"

The scout's knife blade had struck something hard.

He turned it up now and picked it out of the dirt.

Holding it up in the air he whispered shrilly with excitement:

"Upon my word as a man, it's a nugget of pure gold."

Frank was excited.

"Is that so?" he exclaimed; "then there is more! We have hit it!"

The scout tossed the nugget out upon the greensward.

Then both went to work again with a will.

At every turn now they brought nuggets from the auriferous earth.

Certainly the old Spanish don's dying deposition had spoken the truth.

The treasure was vast and beyond the most sanguine of expectations. Frank and Texas Jack were in a fever of excitement.

"Wall, if I ain't glad fer Bill Barstow's widd'er!" cried Texas Jack.

"It'll put her in clover fer ther rest of her days, I reckon."

"I believe it will!" agreed Frank; "but there's one thing queer!"

"What?"

"This mine has been supposed to be long in the possession of Black Plume, the renegade."

"Yas!"

"What is the reason that he has not discovered this before?"

Texas Jack stopped digging.

"Give it up!" he declared.

"It seems very odd!"

"Yes, very."

A sarcastic laugh accompanied this declaration in a harsh voice.

Astounded both men stopped digging and looked up.

Above them with folded arms and a triumphant smile upon his dark, evil features stood a white man armed to the teeth.

It was Black Plume, the renegade. Texas Jack recognized his old foe instantly.

"Black Plume!" he gasped.

"Yes!" said the renegade, with fine sarcasm. "Quite an unexpected meeting, eh?"

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTURES ALL.

It is not by any means an easy matter to describe the sensations of the two gold diggers at that moment.

It was such a sudden and startling happening that neither for a moment knew what to do or say.

And still that cynical, demoniac smile upon Black Plume's face.

"Well," he said, gratingly, "you are a pretty pair, I must say. You have made a nice investment, haven't you? What do you think I will do in the matter? Any treasure found in these parts belongs to me."

Frank Reade, Jr., arose and faced the villain.

"You are a white man and not a savage," he said, sternly. "You can understand what I have to say to you."

Black Plume would have stopped Frank with an angry gesture, but something in the young inventor's manner restrained him.

"Well," he said, coldly, "I will listen. What is it?"

"You claim that this mine is yours?"

"I do."

"By what right?"

The renegade's eyes snapped.

"Take care!" he exclaimed. "Don't dare to insult me!"

"Ay, but I demand to know. You know as well as I the fate of Bill Barstow. He owned the title to the Mazetian mine, and to his widow it belongs now!"

"Say you so?" said the villain, with a sardonic laugh. "Then why don't she come and claim it?"

"I am her representative."

The renegade drew a deep whistle.

"And her champion?"

"If you choose."

"Well, you are quite a man, ain't yer? So you are the fellow that invented that wonderful Steam Horse?"

"I am," replied Frank.

"Well, certainly it was quite a wonderful invention. I have found it such, and that it will make me a nice vehicle to journey around this region in."

"You!" gasped Frank. "You have found it such!"

"Oh, you don't know then that the Steam Horse is in my possession?"

"Heaven!" gasped Frank in dismay. "Is that the truth?"

"It is. If you doubt my word I can very soon find you plenty of proof that I tell the truth."

Frank was wholly overcome with horror. He had not given a thought to Barney and Pomp nor the Steam Horse during his thrilling adventures.

"We are lost!" he groaned, turning to Texas Jack.

"Not much!" growled the scout. "One man ain't goin' to corral me."

"Easy, Texas Jack!" gritted the renegade. "There is more than one man to corral you. Escape is impossible."

"That is for you to say, Jake Snyder," returned the scout, boldly.

"Hold where you are, Texas Jack! There has always been a hard score to settle between you and me."

"Yer right!"

"It begins to near the settlement, and it looks much in my favor." But Texas Jack had drawn his revolvers and backed up against the cliff.

"I die game!" he gritted. "Look out fer that, renegade."

"Throw down those pistols!"

"Never!"

Black Plume made a signal with his hand.

In a moment from the cover of the rocks about there leaped forth a score of painted Apaches.

As many deadly rifles covered the two gold-diggers.

But Texas Jack would not have yielded even then had it not been for Frank Reade, Jr.

The young inventor whispered:

"I say, Jack, don't throw your life away. There's a chance for us yet."

The words had their weight.

The scout lowered his revolvers.

"I'm gone, but ye've got the upper hand, Jake Snyder!" he declared.

"That's the sense of it!" declared the villain, with flashing eyes.

"I've a better fate in store for you."

In a twinkling the two whites were bound hand and foot.

Then, between the fierce Apaches, they were bodily carried along the mountain side.

Black Plume ordered that the gold nuggets unearthed should be thrown back into the pit and covered up.

"I will come for them when I want them," he declared; "it is the safest place for them."

The two prisoners were carried to the mining camp, which we have described in a previous chapter, and where were Barney and Pomp.

It happened that the darky and the Irishman had hardly passed an hour in captivity, when Frank Reade, Jr., and Texas Jack were brought in.

They were all placed within speaking distance.

"Massy sakes, Marse Frank!" exclaimed Pomp, with excitement, "however did dey catch youse?"

"In a very simple manner," replied Frank, relating his experiences; "but how did they get hold of you and the Steam Horse?"

Barney and Pomp both groaned.

But the darky told the truth word for word.

Frank listened, and gazing at the distressed faces of the two humbly penitent jokers, could utter no reproach.

"Well," he said, briefly, "we are not in a very good position here."

"Bejabers, that's throue enough, Misther Frank!" declared Barney.

"Shure, I wish I knew the way out av it."

"Huh! dat's wha' we all wish!" said Pomp, with a snif.

"Don't yez be so fresh, naygur!"

"I ain't 'fraid ob yo', I fish!"

"That's all roight fer yez to say, naygur, now that I'm tied hand an' foot. But if I had me legs now I'd show ye—"

Barney did not finish.

At this moment a delegation of the Apaches came along.

Pomp and Barney were picked up like puppets and carried to the foot of the precipice wall.

Here they were tied to posts, or rather trees, which had been cut off ten feet from the ground.

"Begorra, it's burnin' us at the shake they'll be after doin'!" cried Barney.

"I jes' reckon we'd bettah say our prayers!" moaned Pomp.

But their fears were hardly relieved when they saw the real purpose of their brutal captors.

The Apaches produced a bundle of long-bladed, keen hunting-knives.

Every one of these had been whetted to razor-like keenness.

A distance was measured off and a line drawn.

The Apaches were all the while jabbering furiously and excitedly.

Suddenly one of them picked up a knife and threw it at Pomp.

The darky could not have moved had he attempted to do so, and his belief was strong that his end had come when he saw the knife travelling towards him.

But the keen blade did not penetrate his body, as he feared it would.

On the contrary, it struck the post to which he was tied, not half an inch from his ear.

There it remained sticking.

A loud yell went up from the savages. Pomp's sensations can hardly be imagined.

Cold perspiration broke out all over the poor darky.

"Golly sakes alib!" he moaned. "I done fink dis darky's day am come, fo' suah!"

Another one of the savages advanced with a knife in his hand.

He stood upon the line and swung the knife above his head.

The next moment it was sticking in the post upon the other side of Pomp's skull.

The poor darky was in agony.

The least variation of the knife's course would have sent it into his brain.

The risk was considerably more than he was willing or anxious to incur.

But as it was necessity seemed to sway matters, and the two unfortunate servitors were largely the victims of circumstances.

The savages saw and understood the terror of the unfortunates.

This only added to their enjoyment, and they made the welkin ring with their shouts and derisive laughter.

The post to which Pomp was tied was filled literally full of the knives.

Barney next came in for the same kind of treatment.

After awhile, however, the savages desisted and changed the programme.

And now they indulged in the exhibition of a specimen of the refined cruelty of which their natures were capable.

Stakes were driven into the ground at certain distances apart.

Then Barney and Pomp were thrown at full length on the ground and hands and ankles were bound to these stakes.

In this irksome position they were left for a time.

So widely stretched were their wrists and ankles that they had absolutely no freedom whatever, and the strain upon their aching muscles may be imagined.

This was in itself terrible torture but that the fiends had in store even worse was soon made manifest.

Presently two of the savages advanced carrying a horrid looking burden.

These were two monster diamond back rattlesnakes, with their poisonous heads carefully secured between forked sticks.

To the tail of each snake, just above the rattle, there was tightly tied a strip of rawhide.

This had been soaked well in water and as a result had shrunk to within an inch or two of its natural length.

The snakes were placed upon the ground at a certain distance from the prisoners.

Then the rawhide thongs were securely tied to stakes driven in the ground. Then the reptiles' heads were liberated.

Two maiden rattlers were never seen.

They threw themselves into a coil with a whip-like motion, and hissing savagely, erected their death-dealing heads.

The horrid jaws of each were revealed with their poisonous fangs.

It was truly a terrifying spectacle.

The snakes had been irritated by the savages, and were full ready for an opportunity to wreak vengeance.

The Apaches crowded about with jeering yells and cries, keeping well out of the range of the reptiles' coils.

The rattlesnakes, looking for a victim, saw the two prisoners bound to the stakes.

"Massy on us!" wailed Pomp. "Dat one am puttin' suah gwine fo' to gib me a strike. It am all up wif dis chile if he do."

This seemed to be a certain fact.

One of the snakes had reared its ugly head and had evidently sighted the darky.

Pomp's fears were proven not without foundation, for the reptile made a savage lunge at him.

CHAPTER XII.

APACHE TORTURES.

It is a well-known fact that the rattlesnake can strike an object its full length.

So, as this monster made the lunge at Pomp, the darky gave himself up for lost.

He expected almost instantly to feel the reptile's fangs.

The snake struck his full length, and his hideous head came within a bare inch of Pomp's face.

So close was it that flecks of matter from the poisonous fangs spat-tered in the darky's face,

But the fangs did not strike him as luck had it.

Pomp was just out of reach.

The darky drew a deep breath of relief. Again and again the snake struck, but each time he failed to reach his victim.

Pomp groaned in his agony of fear and apprehension.

"Fo' de Lor' sakes, take dat dresful fing away!" he cried, pleadingly.

But he might as well have appealed to stone.

The savages only replied with savage jeers and hoots.

Maddened, the snake struck at Pomp again and again.

But each time his fangs fell short.

Finally the reptile desisted, but it circled around the stake to which it was tied, hissing fiercely.

Pomp now understood exactly what the purpose of the savages was.

They intended to torture their captive for a while in this manner. Then very gradually the distance would be lengthened by the drying of the wet and contracted strip of rawhide.

When this came about the snake would be able to strike its victim and the end would be a horrible death, for the poison of the Arizona rattler knows no cure.

A more awful reflection than this the human mind could not conceive of.

In his position Barney was having the same experience.

The two snakes made occasional springs at the prisoners, and it could be seen that at each leap the distance was being diminished.

The fiendish cruelty of an Apache Indian is wholly without an equal.

While Barney and Pomp were undergoing this awful ordeal, Frank Reade, Jr., and Texas Jack were having an experience scarcely less awful.

The fiend, Black Plume, had caused the two men to be stripped to the waist and bound to rings welded in the wall of the cliff.

Then a couple of savages at ten paces practised throwing porcupine spines at their naked bodies.

The spines were keen, and while there was no danger of their penetrating sufficiently to make a mortal wound, yet the agony from them was almost unendurable.

The renegade stood by and roared with laughter as the faces of the prisoners showed their sufferings.

At one time they had fully a score of the quills sticking in various parts of the chest and arms.

Their bodies were dripping with the blood drawn, and the agony increased as the flesh became more and more raw.

"Good Heavens!" gasped Texas Jack, finally. "Why don't ye kill us, renegade, and be done with it?"

Black Plume laughed scornfully.

"It does not suit me to do that," he declared, with a grimace. "I mean that you shall feel my vengeance!"

"For what is your vengeance?" asked Frank, quietly. "What harm have we ever done you?"

"You have come here to dispossess me of Mazetlan."

"It does not belong to you."

"It is mine by all rights."

"That is a foul lie. She who has the just claim upon it is the widow of poor Bill Barstow."

The villain smiled jeeringly.

"Perhaps so," he said, contemptuously. "But perhaps you will tell me how she is going to get possession of it?"

"It certainly don't look like it at present," agreed Frank, "but I can tell you that our fate will not go unavenged!"

"Who will be the avenger?"

"Time will tell."

"Spare your threats. You are not in a position to utter them. Ah, Yellow Dog, Coyote, enough of the quills."

At this word of command, the two savages desisted in throwing the porcupine quills.

At a gesture from Black Plume they brought forward a couple of gourds filled with alkali water from the salt lake below.

This was in solution with other matter, and as with their fingers the torturers began to throw it in a spray upon the raw flesh of the sufferers, the result can well be imagined.

Awful cries of agony escaped the lips of the tortured men.

For a moment they were literally in torment.

After some moments of this treatment, at a motion from the renegade, the two tormentors retired.

"Well!" sneered Black Plume, in his contemptuous way. "What think you of my vengeance now?"

"You are a fiend!" cried Frank, forcibly. "You are also a coward. The brave man kills but does not torture his foe."

Black Plume made an impatient gesture.

"Do not villify me," he said, savagely, "or I shall not be as merciful as I am. You have suffered but a tithe of the torture I have in store for you. I will leave you to reflect upon the folly of your course in coming into this region. *Au revoir!*"

Mockingly the villain laughed and then strode away.

For a time Frank and Texas Jack suffered excruciating agony from the effect of the alkali upon their wounds.

After a time, Frank said:

"I am afraid we are doomed, Jack."

"Wall, I swear I feel like it myself, pard."

"Is there no way that we can possibly escape?"

"I don't think of any."

Not fifty yards away was the Steam Horse.

Frank gazed wistfully at his wonderful invention, and reflected upon the mighty risk of invading a region so thickly infested with bad characters.

But yet he had nothing to regret.

Fortune had been against them.

His had been a philanthropic mission, and he had striven to execute it nobly.

But failure seemed upon him.

It was hard to think so, yet there was the indisputable fact.

How he longed in his heart at that moment for liberty to gain possession once more of the Steam Horse, and overthrowing the villainous Black Plume, wipe out the curse of the region.

But there seemed no chance.

He had writhed in his bonds and tried to loosen them.

But he did not seem able to do this.

Texas Jack, however, had been intently watching the movements of the Apaches.

Suddenly he whispered:

"Frank!"

"What?"

"What's the racket now? Do ye see that medicine man?"

A medicine man, rigged up in an outlandish fashion, had appeared in the mouth of the mine entrance.

He commenced to chant and beat two clubs together in a furious manner.

At once the whole Apache gang made a rush for the mine.

They vanished within it, and not one remained outside.

Barney and Pomp yet lay upon the ground, with the two venomous rattlers trying ineffectually to reach them.

It was certain that before very long they would really succeed in doing this.

Then the fate of the two servitors would be settled forever.

Every one of the Apaches and Black Plume, the renegade, as well had answered the call of the medicine man.

They were all in the mine.

From the sounds which emanated therefrom it was safe to assume that a grand pow-wow, or council was being held.

That this was a fact Frank and Texas Jack felt assured.

A yearning hope seized Frank.

Oh, if he could only loosen his bonds. How easy it would be by a dash to liberate the others, gain the Steam Horse and make a break for liberty.

But Frank lamed his wrists in the vain endeavor.

He was bound with stout thongs and they would not yield.

But suddenly the young inventor was given an electrical thrill.

The scout spoke!

"Frank!"

"Well?"

"Sh! Keep cool. I honestly believe that I can loosen my bonds!"

Frank gave a gasping cry.

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes, I do!"

"God help you to succeed!"

"I think I shall!"

Several moments of suspense followed. Frank was in an agony of fear.

The sounds from the mine now were not encouraging. It seemed as if the Apaches were going to come out.

But they did not.

As fortune had it the council was a long one. Doubtless many important questions were up for discussion.

"How are you getting on, Jack?"

"Slow! Just a bit more and I'll have my wrist out."

"You'll have to hurry."

"I know it!"

"It is our last chance!"

"You bet!"

The scout writhed and wriggled for some moments. Then to Frank Reade, Jr.'s inexpressible relief came the whisper:

"Hooray! I've got it, pard!"

Texas Jack had one hand free.

"Good for you!" exclaimed Frank, jubilantly. "Lose no time."

"You bet I won't."

The scout's arms were free.

At once his nimble fingers began to untie the rope about his ankles. Success was with him.

The knot yielded.

He was free. With a quick, panther-like spring he picked up a knife from the ground near.

"I've got my liberty!" he declared. "They will take my life before I will give it up again."

"Good!" said Frank. "We will die game!"

"Yer right!"

With a quick movement the scout cut the bonds of Frank Reade, Jr.

The young inventor picked up a club and started to the rescue of Barney and Pomp.

The two servitors had in the meantime narrowly escaped death.

The rawhide thongs were fast relaxing and very soon the deadly reptiles must be able to reach them. One blow from their fangs would end all.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END.

FRANK READE, JR., was well aware of the necessity of speedy action.

With the club he sprang for the reptiles.

One of them had just made a desperate strike at Pomp.

The darky could have sworn that the deadly fangs scraped his forehead.

But luckily they did not take effect.

With a swift blow with one of the clubs Frank dispatched one of the reptiles.

But in doing this, through an inadvertence, he nearly sacrificed his life.

Unwittingly he came within range of the other snake.

The reptile struck at him fiercely.

The snake's fangs caught in Frank's boot leg, but fortunately did not penetrate the skin.

It was a close call.

A second blow dispatched the reptile.

Then Frank turned to the prisoners.

"Och hone, Misster Frank, shure I knew well ye'd come," cried Barney. "Ye niver forgot us yet."

"No," replied Frank. "If you are to die we will all die together."

Quickly he cut the bonds of the two faithful servitors.

They were upon their feet quickly.

All four of them were free.

With weapons they could have made a respectable fight against the Indians.

But Frank had no idea of making such a stand.

He thought only of getting possession of the Steam Horse.

With the Horse once more in his hands he felt that he could defy Black Plume and his gang.

At least he would take care not to get into their clutches again.

There stood the Horse with half steam on. Frank had started for the wagon, when suddenly Texas Jack clutched his arm.

"Hold on, pard!" he said, nervously. "I tell ye something awful is going ter happen."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Frank, in surprise.

"Listen," repeated the scout, solemnly, "Don't ye feel and hear anything?"

Frank did feel and hear something, and in that instant he partook of the scout's curious sensations and fear.

The sky overhead was copper color.

The air was tomb-like in its oppressive stillness. But what seemed miles away was a dull roar like the thunder of an oncoming cyclone, while there was an indistinct trembling of the ground.

"What is it?" exclaimed Frank, in surprise.

"Wall," replied the scout, with pallid face, "I've been in Vera Cruz when they've had an earthquake, and it always seemed just like this and —"

The scout never finished the sentence. At that moment from the mine there came a sudden, long-drawn wailing cry.

Then all four were thrown upon their faces.

The ground rocked, the air was filled with a sullen, awful roar. Not thirty seconds did it all last.

Then it was over.

The scout was first upon his feet.

The Steam Horse was yet in its place. Barney and Pomp and Frank Reade, Jr., were unharmed.

But the scout with an awful cry clutched Frank's arm and pointed to the mouth of the mine.

A fearful sight was revealed.

The whole shaft was closed in full. The shock of the earthquake had caused it to cave in.

And there buried in the debris were the murderous Apaches with their leader, Black Plume. Retribution swift and terrible had overtaken them.

The little party exchanged glances and then turned their gaze reverently Heavenward. To them there was in the awful tragedy the hand of a Mighty Power, which always intercedes for the just and the righteous.

There was no further trouble about proving the title to the Mazetlan mine.

The Apache gang under Black Plume thus disposed of it was not difficult to induce reputable miners to come into the region.

The mine was opened by Frank Reade, Jr., and turned over to the Widow Barstow. She in turn disposed of it for several million dollars to a stock company.

Thus she was enabled to meet the demon of want successfully. But to her dying day she will always bless Frank Reade, Jr., for his kindness to her.

Frank with Barney and Pomp and the Steam Horse returned to Readestown.

Texas Jack went back to his old life on the plains. Nothing would induce him to abandon it.

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